

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSE

This introduction is intended to provide the reader with general information regarding (1) the purpose of an environmental impact report (EIR), (2) standards for EIR adequacy, (3) an introduction to the format and content of this EIR, and (4) the EIR processing requirements for the project. Environmental documents can be confusing; this section is provided to educate the reader regarding the intent, format, and content of this EIR so that it can be more easily understood.

1.2 PROJECT BACKGROUND AND PLANNING PROCESS

The City of Azusa is located in eastern Los Angeles County approximately 25 miles northeast of the City of Los Angeles. The City encompasses 9.13 square miles and is bordered by the Angeles National Forest to the north, the Cities of Irwindale and Covina to the south, the City of Glendora to the east, and the Cities of Duarte and Bradbury to the west. The Azusa Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Specific Plan area (specific plan area) covers approximately 308 acres, with approximately 170 acres of proposed development opportunities, and approximately 138 acres of no-change areas.

Project Background

On September 10, 2012, City staff submitted an application to the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Agency (Metro) for Round 3 of their Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Planning Grant program. The TOD Planning Grant Program is designed to spur the adoption of local land use regulations that create a regulatory environment supportive of TOD in Los Angeles County, as well as pre-regulatory planning efforts that can lead to the adoption of such local land use regulations. The Planning Grant Program was open to municipalities with land use regulatory control over property within 0.25-mile of designated transit corridors. In February 2013, Metro awarded the City a \$653,000 grant to develop to specific plan and promote TOD around the Azusa Downtown Gold Line Station and Azusa Pacific University (APU)/Citrus Station.

The Specific Plan also supports regional goals and is consistent with the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) Compass Blueprint Program principles of enhancing mobility, livability, prosperity, and sustainability in Southern California communities. Additionally, the Specific Plan advances the objectives of AB 32 and helps implement SB 375 by encouraging compact, mixed-use districts that locate housing, jobs, recreation, and other daily needs within close proximity.

The planning effort for the Specific Plan started in early 2014 with the formation of a planning team to guide the planning process and development of the Specific Plan's vision and objectives. In May 2014, the City hosted a public workshop to solicit community input including design ideas and to determine what issues were most important to the community.

Project Summary

The Azusa TOD Specific Plan (project) provides a land use and policy framework to support the transformation of Azusa's future TOD areas into sustainable and economically vibrant districts. The Azusa TOD Specific Plan focuses on implementing a community-based vision for the two Gold line stations located in the City, Azusa Downtown Gold Line Station and APU/Citrus Station, and the immediate surrounding areas. The Azusa TOD Specific Plan provides direction on how properties within various districts should be developed, as well as addresses a variety of issues including traffic, bicycle and pedestrian improvements, streetscape enhancements, sustainability, infrastructure, historic resources, and architectural character. Those current land uses inconsistent with the Azusa TOD Specific Plan would become non-conforming and remain in place until the property owner(s) decide to sell and/or redevelop their properties. The project does not propose to demolish properties.

1.3 PURPOSE AND LEGAL AUTHORITY

Subsequent to the passage of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) in 1970, a process was established that would (1) inform governmental decision makers and the public about the potentially significant environmental effects of proposed activities, (2) identify ways that environmental damage can be avoided or significantly reduced, (3) prevent significant, avoidable damage to the environment by requiring changes in projects through the use of alternatives or mitigation measures when the governmental agency finds the changes to be feasible, and (4) disclose to the public the reasons why a governmental agency approved the project in the manner the agency chose if significant environmental effects are involved.¹ This information is the basis of any EIR.

This EIR is to serve as an informational document for the public, and decision makers of the City of Azusa. The EIR process will culminate with City Council hearings to consider certification of a Final EIR and consideration of the project.

¹ State of California, *State CEQA Guidelines*, as amended, Section 15002(a) of the California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Chapter 3.

1.4 EIR ADEQUACY

The principal use of an EIR is to provide input and information as one aspect of a comprehensive planning analysis. Given the important role of the EIR in the planning and decision-making process, it is imperative that the information presented in the EIR be factual, adequate, and complete. The standards for adequacy of an EIR, defined in Section 15151 of the *State CEQA Guidelines*, are as follows:

An EIR should be prepared with a sufficient degree of analysis to provide decision makers with information which enables them to make a decision which intelligently takes account of environmental consequences. An evaluation of the environmental effects of a proposed project need not be exhaustive, but the sufficiency of an EIR is to be reviewed in light of what is reasonably feasible. Disagreement among experts does not make an EIR inadequate, but the EIR should summarize the main points of disagreement among the experts. The courts have looked not for perfection but for adequacy, completeness, and a good faith effort at full disclosure.

This EIR has been prepared by the City of Azusa in accordance with CEQA, the *State CEQA Guidelines* and City guidelines for the implementation of CEQA.

1.5 LEAD, RESPONSIBLE AND TRUSTEE AGENCIES

The *State CEQA Guidelines* define “lead,” “responsible,” and “trustee” agencies. The City of Azusa is the lead agency for the project because it has the initial responsibility for approving the project.

A “responsible agency” refers to a public agency other than the lead agency that has discretionary approval over the project. A “trustee agency” refers to a state agency having jurisdiction by law over natural resources affected by the project. There are no responsible or trustee agencies associated with the project.

1.6 ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

The environmental review process, as required under CEQA, is summarized below. The steps are presented in sequential order.

1. **Notice of Preparation (NOP) Distributed.** Immediately after deciding that an EIR is required, the lead agency files an NOP soliciting input on the EIR scope to “responsible,” “trustee,” and involved federal agencies; to the State Clearinghouse, if one or more state agencies is a responsible or trustee agency; and to parties previously requesting notice in writing. A scoping meeting to solicit public input on the issues to be assessed in the EIR, while not always required, may be conducted by the lead agency.

2. **Draft Environmental Impact Report (Draft EIR) Prepared.** The Draft EIR must contain a (1) table of contents or index, (2) summary, (3) project description, (4) environmental setting, (5) environmental impacts (direct, indirect, cumulative, growth-inducing and unavoidable impacts), (6) alternatives, (7) mitigation measures, (8) irreversible changes, and (9) organizations and persons consulted.
3. **Public Notice and Review.** The lead agency must prepare a Notice of Availability (NOA) of an EIR. The Notice must be posted in the County Clerk's office for 30 days (Public Resources Code Section 21092.3) and sent to anyone requesting it. Additionally, public notice of Draft EIR availability must be given through at least one of the following procedures: (1) publication in a newspaper of general circulation, (2) posting on and off the project site, and (3) direct mailing to owners and occupants of contiguous properties (as the Specific Plan covers approximately 308 acres of the City and encompasses thousands of properties it is not plausible to post the NOA around the Plan Area or mail a copy of the NOA to owners and occupants of contiguous properties. Thus, the NOA will be published in the local newspaper). The lead agency must consult with and request comments on the Draft EIR from responsible and trustee agencies, and adjacent cities and counties. The minimum public review period for a Draft EIR is 30 days. When a Draft EIR is sent to the State Clearinghouse for review, the public review period must be 45 days, unless a shorter period is approved by the State Clearinghouse (Public Resources Code 21091). Distribution of the Draft EIR may be required through the State Clearinghouse.
4. **Notice of Completion.** The lead agency must file a Notice of Completion with the State Clearinghouse as soon as it completes a Draft EIR.
5. **Final EIR (Final EIR).** A Final EIR must include (1) the Draft EIR or a revision thereof, (2) copies of comments received during public review, (3) list of persons and entities commenting, and (4) responses to comments.
6. **Certification of Final EIR.** Prior to approving a project, the lead agency shall certify that (1) the Final EIR has been completed in compliance with CEQA, (2) the Final EIR was presented to the decision-making body of the lead agency, and (3) the decision-making body reviewed and considered the information in the Final EIR. A Notice of Determination must be filed with the County Clerk within five days of the certification of the Final EIR.
7. **Lead Agency Project Decision.** The lead agency may (1) disapprove a project because of its significant environmental effects; (2) require changes to a project to reduce or avoid significant environmental effects; or (3) approve a project despite its significant environmental effects, if the proper findings and statement of overriding considerations are adopted.
8. **Findings/Statement of Overriding Considerations.** For each significant impact of the project identified in the EIR, the lead or responsible agency must find, based on substantial evidence, that either (1) the project has been changed to avoid or substantially reduce the magnitude of the impact; (2) changes to the project are within another agency's jurisdiction and such changes have or should be adopted; or (3) specific economic, social, or other considerations make the mitigation measures or project alternatives infeasible. If an agency approves a project with unavoidable significant environmental effects, it must prepare a written Statement of Overriding Considerations that sets forth the specific social, economic, or other reasons supporting the agency's decision.

9. **Mitigation Monitoring/Reporting Program.** When an agency makes findings on significant effects identified in the EIR, it must adopt a reporting or monitoring program for mitigation measures that were adopted or made conditions of project approval to mitigate significant effects.
10. **Notice of Determination.** An agency must file a Notice of Determination after deciding to approve a project for which an EIR is prepared. A local agency must file the Notice with the County Clerk. The Notice must be posted for 30 days and sent to anyone previously requesting notice. Posting of the Notice starts a 30-day statute of limitations on CEQA challenges.

1.7 EIR FORMAT AND CONTENT

Report Format

Among the principal objectives of CEQA is that the environmental review process be a public one, and that the EIR be an informational document for governmental decision makers and the public about potential significant environmental effects of proposed activities.

The environmental impact analysis presented in this EIR is divided into four major sections within **Section 4.0, Environmental Impact Analysis**, which describe the existing conditions present in the area surrounding the project site, predict the potential individual and cumulative impacts attributable to the project, present mitigation measures that are intended to minimize or avoid significant impacts caused by the project, and identify the significant impacts that would occur after implementation of mitigation measures.

Report Content

Notice of Preparation

To determine which environmental topics should be addressed in this EIR, the City of Azusa prepared and circulated a Notice of Preparation (NOP) from February 4, 2015 through March 6, 2015. The NOP was circulated in order to receive input from interested public agencies (e.g., responsible and trustee agencies) and private parties on the EIR. Per *State CEQA Guidelines*, an NOP is to be circulated for 30 days, allowing agencies and the public to provide the lead agency with specific detail about their desires for the scope and content of the environmental information to be included in the EIR. A list of the letters and comments submitted during the NOP comment period are provided in **Appendix 1.0**.

Scoping Meetings

In compliance with *State CEQA Guidelines*, the City held a scoping meeting on February 11, 2015 with the Planning Commission to solicit comments and to inform the public of the Program EIR.

Topics Addressed in the EIR

This EIR addresses the issues determined to be potentially significant based on the project's Initial Study, input from neighbors in the community, and responses to the NOP. The NOP and Initial Study are provided in **Appendix 1.0**. This EIR addresses these issues and identifies potentially significant environmental impacts of the project and cumulative development in the City in accordance with provisions set forth in the *State CEQA Guidelines*. The EIR also recommends feasible mitigation measures, where possible, that would reduce or eliminate adverse environmental effects.

The issues addressed in this EIR include:

- Aesthetics
- Cultural Resources
- Geology and Soils
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Land Use
- Population, Housing, and Employment
- Recreation
- Utilities and Service Systems
- Air Quality
- Energy
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Noise
- Public Services
- Traffic and Circulation

In addition to these technical sections, other important information is incorporated as part of this EIR. As required by CEQA, this EIR also includes a (1) description of the existing environmental and regulatory setting; (2) description of the project; (3) a description and analysis of alternatives that can reduce the project's impact potential (included in **Section 5.0 Alternatives**); and (4) sections that summarize cumulative, long-term, and irreversible effects associated with the project.

Documents referred to, referenced, or cited are incorporated by reference and are available for review at the City of Azusa Economic and Community Development Department, 213 East Foothill Boulevard, Azusa, California 91702.

1.8 AVAILABILITY OF THE DRAFT EIR

The Draft EIR has been distributed to affected agencies, surrounding cities, and interested parties for a 45-day review period in accordance with Section 15087 of the *State CEQA Guidelines*. During the 45-day review period, which commences on July 1, 2015 and ends on August 17, 2015, the Draft EIR is available for general public review at the following location:

- City of Azusa, Economic and Community Development Department, 213 East Foothill Boulevard

Additionally, the Draft EIR can be downloaded or reviewed via the Internet at:
(<http://www.ci.azusa.ca.us/>).

Interested parties may provide written comments on the Draft EIR. Written comments on the Draft EIR must be received by August 17, 2015, and should be addressed to:

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